DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 219 777 CS 207 110

AUTHOR Gefvert, Constance J.
TITLE Another Look at the Modes: Kinneavy Reconsidered.
PUB DATE Mar 82
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (33rd, San Francisco, CA, March 18-20, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Discourse Analysis; *Educational Theories; *Essays; Higher Education; *Rhetoric; *Writing Evaluation; Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Kinneavy (James); *Rhetorical Theories

ABSTRACT

In his rhetorical theory, James Kinneavy distinguishes between "aim" and "mode," but his modes do not represent kinds of reality; instead they represent more specific aims on a lower level of abstraction. Although Kinneavy's classification has been useful in the classroom, seeing the modes as specific aims yields even more pedagogical applications. For instance, we can look at one form of discourse--the essay--as a structured hierarchy of dominant and supporting aims. These structured aims play a dual role, functioning as dominating aims for their section or subsection of the essay and acting as supporting aims for the dominant aims of the whole. This perspective reveals the complexity of the comparison contrast essay that rhetoric texts so often oversimplify. Keeping in mind that what Kinneavy calls modes are only different in degree from what he calls aims helps us see more clearly the hierarchy of aims in all discourse. (JL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED219777

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Constance J. Gefvert

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Constance J. Gefvert
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
and State University
July 30, 1982

ANOTHER LOOK AT THE MODES: KINNEAVY RECONSIDERED

The modes of discourse have long posed a problem in the teaching of composition. Since the time of Aristotle, scholars and teachers have tried to identify the types of discourse according to a variety of classification systems. Aristotle divided discourse into two major classes and several sub-classes, according to the aim or purpose of the discourse. The two major classes were poetry, whose purpose is imitation, and rhetoric, whose purpose is persuasion. In turn, Aristotle identified three sub-classes of rhetoric, also on the basis of aim: deliberative rhetoric, whose purpose is exhortation--to move an audience to some kind of action (or to refrain from a certain action); judicial rhetoric, whose purpose is to convince the audience of the justice or injustice of some action, as in a court of law; and epideictic or ceremonial rhetoric, whose purpose is to praise the action or life of a hero.

Under the influence of the sophist Isocrates, the classification of Aristotle and other Greek rhetoricians became hardened into a set of rigidly defined forms in which students were required to compose. Thus a classification originally based on aim became later defined according to form.

A similar fate happened to another system of classifying the forms of discourse. The Greek teachers Aphthonius and Hermogenes developed a series of exercises called the progymnasmata, or preparatory exercises. Students were asked to compose in a variety of forms in preparation for their

CS207110

training in oratory. These forms included, for instance, fables, tales, confirmations, refutations, comparisons, encomiums, and many others. Each of these types of discourse can be related to Aristotle's three sub-classes of rhetoric: the fable, tale, proverb, and thesis provide good preparation for deliberative oratory; confirmation, refutation, and comparison provide preparation for judicial rhetoric; and the encomium, vituperation, and commonplace provide preparation for ceremonial rhetoric. What is most interesting about the progymnasmata, however, is that they represent aims or purposes that help support the broader aim of deliberative, judicial, or ceremonial rhetoric. The fable, for example, is not merely a form, but represents an aim--the aim of making a point through an animal story in order to support the larger aim of deliberative oratory.

The progymnasmata came to be used as models for students to imitate, and they influenced the teaching of rhetoric throughout the Roman period, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. It was not until the late nineteenth century that anyone developed a similarly influential system of classifying types of discourse. Alexander Bain, in English Composition and Rhetoric (1890), and William Cairns, in The Forms of Discourse (1896), used associationist psychology as a basis for classification, along with some sub-classes based on form and aim. In associationist psychology, the three categories of the mind are the understanding, the will, and the feelings. Bain suggested a five-part classification of discourse: description, narration, and exposition, all of which relate to the understanding; persuasion, related to the will; and poetry, related to the feelings. The function of description is to evoke sense impressions in the audience; the function of narration to relate a story or event; the function of exposition to inform; of argumentation to convince and persuade; of poetry,

to please and entertain. If we trace these modes back to classical rhetoric, we find an eclectic choice of forms from both Aristotle's classification and the progymnasmata. Narration, description, and exposition all are slightly more general versions of the progymnasmata--for instance, the fable, the proverb, definition, comparison. Persuasion and poetry, on the other hand, derive from Aristotle's two major classes.

Since the time of Bain and Cairns, almost all of English composition has been taught according to the four major modes of narration, description, exposition, and persuasion. (The fifth, poetry, is generally relegated to creative writing courses.) The more specific forms of the progymnasmata have also survived into the twentieth century in slightly varied form, influenced by various interpretations of Aristotle's topoi. They turn up in some textbooks as methods of developing paragraphs or essays, in some texts as forms of prose, in some as patterns or models to be imitated. The problem with all these uses is that they give students an oversimplified view of discourse: Instead of treating the modes as preparatory exercises like the progymnasmata, many traditional textbooks teach students that there are certain pre-set forms into which they should fit their ideas when writing essays, reports, or other "real-world" types of writing.

Another problem with the legacy we have inherited from Bain, Cairns, and other philosophers of the modes is an inconsistent basis for classification. Bain and Cairns, for instance, classify the modes according to the functions of the mind, but in order to subdivide discourse related to the understanding, they retreat to traditional criteria: the modes of narration, description, and exposition are distinguished by both form and purpose. In Cairns' work, persuasion and argumentation are further subdivided according to aim and method.

There have been other attempts to define and classify the modes, but I wish to focus now on James Kinneavy, who has developed the most influential and useful classification in the twentieth century. Kinneavy attempts to sort out the confusion caused by various bases for classifying the modes by first distinguishing between aim and mode. The aims of discourse in Kinneavy's system are expressive, persuasive, referential, and literary. The persuasive and literary aims parallel the two major classes of Aristotle, which are also included in Bain's and Cairns' systems; the referential aim roughly parallels Bain's and Cairns' expository classification; and the expressive aim is a relatively new one in rhetoric, though one which M. H. Abrams and other critics have shown to be integral to the Romantic movement. Kinneavy relates the four aims to the four major components of the communications triangle: the expressive aim focuses primarily on the speaker or writer; the persuasive aim focuses on the audience; the referential aim focuses on the reality to which the text refers; and the literary aim focuses on the text itself. Kinneavy further subdivides the referential aim into three types according to more specific aims: exploratory, scientific, and informative.

As Kinneavy is careful to insist, every piece of discourse, be it spoken or written, involves relationships among all four of these elements in the communications triangle, and the aims frequently overlap:

> In many cases in these overlaps, one of the aims is dominant and the other is a means. Information included in an advertisement is there to further the persuasion, so that persuasion is the primary aim. In some literature, it is obvious that persuasion is a secondary motif. Instances of one aim's subsuming another or several as means can be easily multiplied. And it is interesting to see what happens to information in a persuasive context, or to persuasion in a literary context, or to persuasion in an expressive context. This subordination of one or several aims to a dominant aim in a given discourse is the usual pattern that overlap takes.[1]

In developing the modes, Kinneavy is necessarily less illuminating, because the purpose of the Theory of Discourse was to develop his theory of aims. (Scholars still eagerly await the promised second volume which is to treat the modes.) The modes of discourse are narration (history), analysis (description), evaluation (criticism), and classification (theory). They are, in Kinneavy's words, "classifications of kinds of reality referred to by full texts . . ." (p. 35).

> These four modes of discourse are not an application of the communication triangle. They actually are grounded in certain philosophic concepts of the nature of reality considered as being or becoming. This is not surprising. The ultimate attempt of discourse to refer to reality should, as much as possible, be grounded in the nature of reality, not the nature of language.[2]

The origin of Kinneavy's modes is eclectic. Recognizing that narration and description are of a different order than exposition and persuasion, Kinneavy has pulled them out of Bain's and Cairns' quintet and treated them together with evaluation and classification, whose origin may be found in the progymnasmata. While stressing that the four modes refer to kinds of reality, Kinneavy nevertheless emphasizes that the modes, like the aims, may overlap:

> No theory of modes of discourse ever pretends that modes do not overlap. In actuality, it is impossible to have pure narration, description, evaluation, or classification. However, in a given discourse there will often be what Morris calls a "dominant" mode.[3]

Clearly the modes of narration, description, evaluation, and classification are different from the aims of expression, exposition, persuasion, and literature. I question, however, that the difference is so much one of kind as one of degree. I would argue that the modes do not really represent kinds of reality; instead, they represent more specific aims on a lower level of abstraction. Let me defend this thesis by using

Kinneavy's own examples. He suggests that one can classify the modes according to the answer to the question, "What is this text about?" As examples, he cites the following:

> "It's a story about the wife of Napoleon's general;" or, "It's a study of the kinds of mental abnormalities;" or, "It's a severe criticism of the Eisenhower administration;" or, "It's a description of the topography of Northern New Mexico." Such formulations would lead to categories like: a narrative, a series of classifications, a criticism or evaluation, and a description.[4]

These answers, however, do not really address the question "What is it about?" so much as "What is it?" The reality Kinneavy refers to--the story, the study, the criticism, the description--is not the reality referred to <u>in</u> the text, but the form of the text itself considered as a "thing." Further, the form of the text is dictated by its purpose or aim--to tell a story, to study something, to evaluate something, to describe something. And any of these purposes may serve as means to fulfilling one of the larger aims--expressive, referential, persuasive, or literary. Let me, then, refer to Kinneavy's aims as general aims and to his modes as specific aims. To illustrate, an author who is asked what her aim is might answer, "to tell a story about something." That is a <u>specific</u> or immediate aim--narration. If asked <u>why</u> she wants to tell that story, she might respond, "to convince someone of something or to make a point," "to explore an idea or to inform someone of an experience," "to entertain someone," or "to express myself." These answers would represent <u>general</u> or long-range aims. Usually, more than one aim will be evident at each level, although as Kinneavy has suggested, one will dominate. The important point is to see the aims in a hierarchy: one would tell a story in order to make a persuasive point, but one would not ordinarily be persuasive in order to tell a story.

A great deal more can be done with this approach to the modes as specific aims--particularly in reference to the typical forms or structures which discourse assumes when certain aims are dominant, as well as the kind of language common to certain aims. Here, however, I only want to argue that the aims and the modes as Kinneavy classifies them are different in degree, not in kind; in other words, what Kinneavy calls the modes of discourse can more usefully be viewed as specific aims.

Richard Connors has persuasively argued that any classification system we devise should be useful to students, to the teaching of writing, not merely on elegant theory in itself.[5] Kinneavy's classification of the aims has proved to be eminently useful in the classroom. I believe that my suggestion can make the modes even more useful. To illustrate, let me suggest how this approach can be applied in the classroom with one specific medium or genre of discourse--the essay.

Since each essay has a dominant aim as well as various supporting aims, the aims in a given discourse assume a hierarchy. Usually one aim is dominant as the structural principle of a discourse (discourse referring to a complete piece of writing, whether that be a book, essay, letter, report, or anything else that is complete). Likewise, chapters or sections within a discourse (which may or may not correspond to paragraphs) have their own dominant aims which support the dominant aim of the whole piece. And parts or subsections will be shaped by dominant aims that are in turn supporting aims for the sections of which they are a part. In other words, aims play a dual role--dominating the structures beneath them and supporting the structures above them, much like a building of several stories, in which the ceiling of one room is also the floor of the room above; or as in a family, in which a person is a child of his parents as well as a parent to his children.

The sample essay that follows appeared in the Sunday feature section of the Roanoke Times and World News and works very well with composition classes.

TWO HENRYS AT THE WATERSHED[6]

One was bald, bearded, slight and wizened, growing in his old age to resemble a shriveled little monkey crouching, waiting and watching in the corner of his cage. The other was bald, bearded, inclined to portliness and reminiscent, in his old age, shaved and shining, of a late Roman emperor. Henry Adams, Henry James: between them they defined the American mind of the turn of the century; and it has always seemed to me one of the finer coincidences of our brief history that they should have been not only contemporaries but the closest of friends.

They were not really as alike as I have chosen to suggest, of course, but they shared so much, and ended so similarly, that it is tempting to treat them as virtual twins, the Tweedledum and Tweedledee of America's coming-of-age, two men whose ideas, concerns and creations describe as perhaps no one else could the ways in which Americans would develop in the decades that came after them. Neither knew it at the time, to be sure, for it was Theodore Roosevelt, described by Adams as "pure Act," who dominated the age; but both men's work, for us, is prophetic, while T. R.'s now seems to us the first false step toward the self-destruction for which we appear destined.

They came by their greatness naturally. Both were members of the single intellectual aristocracy America has produced--Adams by way of his father, grandfather and great-grandfather, the latter two of whom occupied the White House, James by way of his Swedenborgian father, one of the rare philosophical influences by mid-19th century America, and in concern with his equally brilliant brother William, who, as both philosopher and psychologist, remains one of the most original of American thinkers. That both lines could produce such exceptional minds for decade after decade--for Adams's brother Brooks was almost as distinguished as he, while Alice James, sister of Henry and William, was an extraordinary woman in her own right--suggests the intellectual wealth upon which the America of their time, had it chosen to, could have drawn. That it did not is revealing. Both men suffered for the refusal, but America suffered more.

They met at Harvard in 1870 and then again, thereafter at frequent intervals, usually in England or on the Continent, occasionally, in old age, at Adams's celebrated house on Lafayette Square in Washington. Yet as congenial as each found the other, they were working in opposite directions, and as the years passed each came also to view the other with increasing wariness, perhaps because with so much in common their differences came more and more to seem enormous.

For Adams, of course, the central problem of the age--he came by the view from a distinguished career in teaching, the authorship of some of the finest history written in America, and exposure, year in and year out, to the public issues being faced or ducked in Washington--was how America

and the world were to subjugate and control the inconceivable energy created by the mechanical and electrical technology developed during the 19th century. It seemed to him that the world might fly literally out of control unless man found a way to harness what he had unleashed; the dynamo, which for him symbolized pure power, was fragmenting all of life, might end by destroying it. It is--with what has happened since--an uncanny prophecy of the issue with which we live with no surcease.

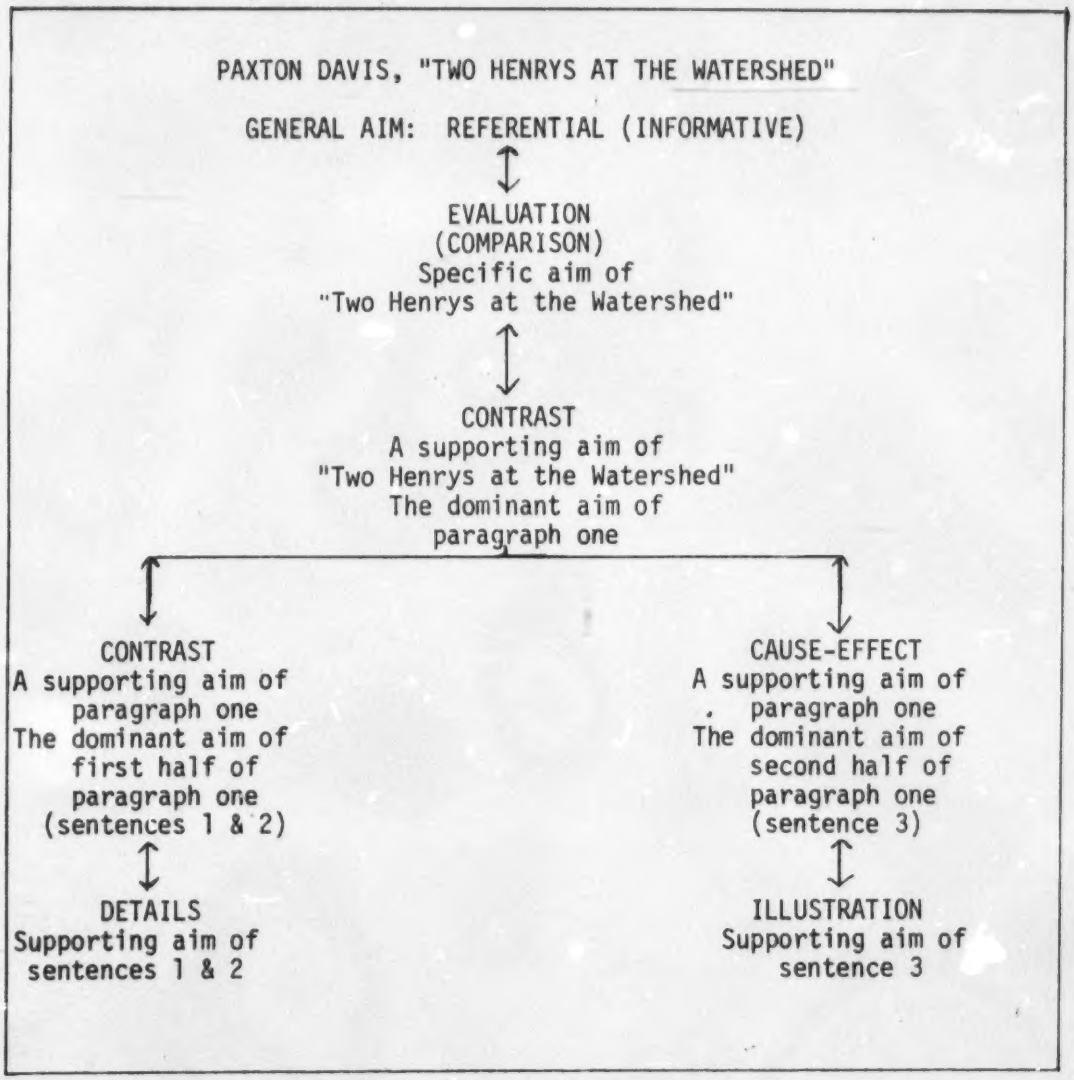
James came at life from a different perspective. Where Adams was intensely analytical, James thought through his senses, his imagination, and found truth in the continuum of the emotions. Their visions of life, as Leon Edel has observed, were diametrically dissimilar. For James, "it was all an act of joyful and imaginative curiosity; for Adams it was a gloomy questioning . . ." Yet even there they found common ground, for, as Edel says, "Henry James sought to create laws for novels; Henry Adams was seeking the laws of history."

Between them, at all events, they created what we now know were the masterworks, in prose at least, of their era. Adams's crowning achievements were Mont St. Michel and Chartres, in which his analysis of the problem of energy was laid out against the unity he perceived, as symbolized by the Virgin, in the Middle Ages, and The Education of Henry Adams, that greatest--and bitterest--of all American autobiographies. James, ever industrious, wrote nearly 20 novels and hundreds of stories, plays, essays, travel sketches and autobiographical pieces, but nothing more permanent than the three great novels of his final period, The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl, in which his luminous poetic language was used at its most delicate to peel away, layer by layer, the most subtle nuances of human character and emotion. For him the final truth lay in the truth of human relationships, and no one before or since him has refined them so perfectly.

The two Henrys--so I have long thought of them, and so they come down to us, simplified and made increasingly digestible, in the schoolbooks--our twin towers of greatness. How odd both would have found that, too; for both died, little more than two years apart, in the belief that their lives were failures; the one because America, as he saw it, had no use for an Adams with his education, the other because America had no use for books by anyone named James. But, then we know what happens to prophets.

This essay would be classified in traditional terms as a comparison-contrast essay. But its structure and aims are much more complex than that. To begin with, this article has at least three levels of structure: the discourse (the essay as a whole); the sections of the discourse (which in this case are indented as paragraphs); and subsections (individual sentences and groups of sentences). The general aim is referential and informative: the author's purpose is to show how Henry Adams and Henry James were similar prophets of American culture. The more specific

aim, which is the means of accomplishing the general aim (what Kinneavy would call the dominant mode) is to evaluate and compare the two Henrys. In turn, Davis uses several other subordinate aims to achieve the more general purpose of comparison, including examples, details, and cause-effect analysis--all of which would come under the mode Kinneavy calls description or analysis. Each of these supporting aims serves in turn as a dominant aim for the smaller structures beneath it. As an example, refer to the diagram below.



As the diagram illustrates, the dominant aim of paragraph one is contrast; the author contrasts, or shows the difference, between the two Henrys before he goes on, in subsequent paragraphs, to emphasize comparison, or the similarities between them. But notice in the first two sentences of the paragraph how effectively Davis sets out the details which are the supporting aims of that part of the paragraph--he sets us up for further details of both comparison and contrast when he uses a similar set of words to describe each: "One was bald, bearded, slight and wizened . . .," "The other was bald, bearded, inclined to portliness. . . ." And in the third sentence, which makes up the second half of this paragraph, Davis uses the supporting aim of cause and effect to show that one way in which the two Adams were alike was in the effect they had on American culture: "between them they defined the American mind of the turn of the century."

The rest of the essay follows a similar pattern, with comparison or contrast the dominant aim of each paragraph and various supporting aims used to develop the dominant one:

Paragraph 2:	Dominant Aim:	comparison
	Supporting Aims:	detail, illustration, contrast
Paragraph 3:	Dominant Aim:	comparison
	Supporting Aims:	cause/effect, comparison, illustration, detail.
Paragraph 4:	Dominant Aim:	contrast
	Supporting Aims:	narration, cause/effect
Paragraphs 5 & 6:	Dominant Aim:	contrast
	Supporting Aims:	cause/effect, narration, detail
Paragraph 7:	Dominant Aim:	comparison
	Supporting Aims:	detail, narration, description
Paragraph 8:	Dominant Aim:	comparison
	Supporting Aims:	narration, description, detail

The essay illustrates very well the complexity of the so-called comparison-contrast essay which rhetoric texts so often oversimplify. Beyond that, I trust that this analysis demonstrates the relationship among what have variously been called aims, modes, and patterns--that every piece of discourse is dominated by a general aim and supported, at each lower structural level, by more specific aims. Those specific aims may appropriately be called modes if by that we mean they are aims serving as means of supporting the more general aim. But we should not forget that what Kinneavy calls the modes are in fact not different in kind from the aims, but rather occupy a different level in the hierarchy of aims which informs all discourse.

NOTES

[1]James Kinneavy, A Theory of Discourse (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971; rpt. New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1980), pp. 60-62.

[2]Kinneavy, p. 36.

[3]Kinneavy, p. 37.

[4]Kinneavy, p. 36.

[5]Richard Connors, "The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse," CCC, 32 (December 1981), 455.

[6]Paxton Davis, "Two Henrys at the Watershed," Roanoke Times and World News, June 28, 1980, p. A-9.